

# Construction Contractors: Steps for Success

*A guide to help new contractors navigate the laws and rules, save time and avoid the most common problems that construction businesses face.*



On the cover: Andy Gruhn, (left) a registered contractor in Olympia, talks with Dale Partin, a construction compliance inspector with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries.



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### Save time by renewing online

Go to [www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorRenew](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorRenew).

### Violations cost money

Penalty for working outside your specialty, breaking advertising rules or working while your registration is expired or suspended: \$1,000 fine on the first offense.

## General guidance for construction contractors

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### Keep your registration current

- Know your registration renewal date.
- Make sure your insurance and bond carriers give L&I your company's current proof of insurance and proof of bonding. You can't renew your registration without them.
- Remember, you must be a registered contractor to perform, advertise, offer or submit a bid to:
  - Construct, alter or repair structures.
  - Consult or serve as a superintendent on construction projects.
  - Add to or subtract from real property.
  - Improve, move or demolish real property.
  - Develop residential property to sell.
  - Install cabinets.
  - Remove trees.
  - Flip homes (buy, fix up and sell property) without occupying or using them for one year after renovation is complete. (Registration is not required if you are the property owner and hire a registered general contractor to manage and superintend the project.)

### Specialty contractor? Know your restrictions

- Do not bid to provide services you're not registered to provide.
- Do not subcontract to others unless your specialty job makes it necessary. Examples of proper subcontracting by a specialty contractor:
  - An electrician moves an outlet when the cabinets you install block the outlet.
  - A plumber reinstalls a toilet after you tile the bathroom.
- Understand what's included in your specialty. See specialty descriptions at [www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors) and click on "Registering as a Contractor," or search the Washington Administrative Code for WAC 296-200A-016.

## Follow contractor advertising rules

- The business name in your advertising **must** match your contractor registration name. For instance, if you're registered as *Jane Doe Construction*, you must advertise as *Jane Doe Construction*, NOT as *Jane Doe Homes*. If you want to advertise under different names, you must register each company.
- You must display your contractor registration number on any item you use to solicit business from a consumer. Items could include business cards, brochures, websites, pens, magnets, flyers, ads, bids and contracts.
- Signs on motor vehicles and premises do not require your contractor registration number.
- Don't say you're licensed, bonded and insured in ads. All legal contractors are!
- Your website and ads should include only the services you're registered to provide.

**JANE DOE CONSTRUCTION**

- New construction
- Renovations
- Repairs

**111-234-5678**

123 Anystreet Rd, Anytown, WA

License: janedoe12345

**Bonded and Insured**

**www.janedoeconst.xom**

**Washington State legal requirements for construction contractor ads**

**MUST INCLUDE:**

- .....Registered name
- .....Registered address
- .....Valid registration number

**NOT ALLOWED:**

- .....Words "Bonded" and "Insured" not allowed



## It's just good business. Resolve disputes with customers, subcontractors and suppliers quickly.

Lawsuits against contractors and their bonds, whether valid or not, are posted on L&I's website where potential customers can see them.

If you can't reach an agreement, consider using dispute resolution.

It's a free or low-cost alternative to going to court. For information, go to: **[www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorDisputeResolution](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorDisputeResolution)**.

Be aware: Subcontractors can file lawsuits against the general contractor's bond, but generals can't file against a subcontractor's bond.

## Tools to help consumers make informed hiring choices

### Free contractor marketing cards

This card helps legitimate contractors educate consumers on Washington registration requirements to help them hire smart.

Download it for free by going to **[www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorCard](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ContractorCard)**. Fill it out on your desktop or mobile device and hit print.

**I'm a registered contractor with the State of Washington.**



Registered business name \_\_\_\_\_

Contractor Registration # \_\_\_\_\_

WA Business License # (UBI) \_\_\_\_\_

Washington state law requires contractors to be registered.

Check me out! **ProtectMyHome.net**  
Or call L&I: 1-800-647-0982



Washington State Department of  
Labor & Industries

### Consumer education tools

L&I produces publications to help consumers hire smart. Get copies for free to distribute to potential customers. Publications include:

- *Hiring a Contractor, Remodeler or Handyman* (F625-084-000)
- *Hire Smart Worksheet* (F625-111-000)
- *Hire Smart Plumber Worksheet* (F627-044-000)
- *Facts About Construction Liens* (F625-017-000)

Find these and more resources at **[www.ProtectMyHome.net](http://www.ProtectMyHome.net)** or go to **[www.Lni.wa.gov/Forms](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Forms)** and search for these publications.

### Before you start the job

Notify customers of your bond and your right to file a lien.

- Before you begin jobs valued at more than \$1,000 (including materials and labor), you must provide your customers a *Disclosure Statement Notice to Customer* (F625-030-000). This gives customers notice of your bond and your right to file a lien. Failure to do so can result in a \$500 fine on the first offense. See Page 9 for a sample form or download a fillable copy by going to **[www.Lni.wa.gov/ModelDisclosureStatement](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ModelDisclosureStatement)**.
- If you don't get paid, you can place a lien on a customer's property.
- You must keep a signed copy for your records for three years. You may scan and keep it as an electronic file if you like.
- For more information on liens, read *Facts About Construction Liens* (F625-017-000) at **[www.Lni.wa.gov/IPUB/625-017-000.pdf](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/IPUB/625-017-000.pdf)**. Learn more about the lien laws in Washington by reading and understanding RCW 60.04.

# You're a boss if you hire workers

## Register as an employer

It's simple to do through Washington's Business Licensing Service at [www.bls.dor.wa.gov/file.aspx](http://www.bls.dor.wa.gov/file.aspx). Registration will lead to creation of a workers' compensation insurance account and a state unemployment insurance account.

If you noted that you would be hiring employees when you applied for your Washington Business License, L&I will give you information about your workers' compensation insurance account and Employment Security will give you information about your unemployment insurance account.

## Learn and follow wage and hour requirements

Know the employment regulations, including overtime, breaks and requirements to display workplace posters. For details, see [www.bizguide.wa.gov](http://www.bizguide.wa.gov), "Start your business" chapter.

- Pay workers at least minimum wage, and time-and-a-half for hours in excess of 40 in a workweek (see [www.Lni.wa.gov/Wages](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Wages)).
- Provide at least one paid 10-minute break for every four hours of work, and at least a 30-minute meal period for every five hours of work. Meal periods can be unpaid if the employee is completely relieved of duty.
- If you have workers under the age of 18, learn the work restrictions related to your industry, get a minor work permit endorsement through the Business Licensing Service, and obtain a completed authorization form for each worker (see [www.Lni.wa.gov/TeenWorkers](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/TeenWorkers)).
- Don't deduct anything from paychecks that isn't authorized by law or requested in writing by your employee.
- Know the additional wage and hour requirements if your job is a public works project.

## Required posters

L&I's workplace posters are *free* at any L&I office or available for download at [www.Lni.wa.gov/RequiredPosters](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/RequiredPosters). All posters are also available in Spanish.

## Consider anyone who works for you an employee – even if it's just for a few hours.

This includes friends, family and casual labor, whether you pay them in cash or in trade. You must register as an employer and follow employment laws. See [www.bizguide.wa.gov](http://www.bizguide.wa.gov), "Start your business" chapter.

Exceptions: Spouses of sole proprietors don't have to be covered for workers' compensation insurance. (Rules are different for spouses of owners of corporations or limited liability companies [LLC].) People you hire through a registered employment agency such as Labor Ready, Kelly Services, etc., are not considered your employees for unemployment or workers' compensation purposes, but you are still required to provide a safe workplace.





## Did you know?

Definitions of an independent contractor vary by state agency and the federal government. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) might consider a subcontractor to be an independent contractor, but laws governing L&I could consider the same subcontractor to be your worker.

You will likely be required to have other written safety plans such as a:

- Fall protection plan if there are fall hazards at your job site.
- Hazard communication plan if there are chemicals at your job site.

# Are they your workers or independent contractors?

## Why it's important to know the difference

When you hire individuals, even those whose businesses are licensed or registered, you must provide workers' compensation insurance for them unless they meet L&I's independent contractor test.

Here's the first part of the test. You're likely **not required** to provide workers' compensation insurance if your subcontractors:

- Bring their own employees to the job.  
or
- Bring heavy equipment that they operate.

If they meet one of those conditions, keep the verifying documents for at least four years.

And remember, you are legally required to keep your job site safe for employees (yours or those of a temporary employment agency), subcontractors and independent contractors.

What if your subcontractors don't bring employees or heavy equipment to the job? You **must cover** them for workers' comp insurance unless they meet a strict legal test. This seven-part test includes such conditions as whether your contractor is an established business, works without your direction, works in an independent location, and files federal business income tax. Read more about this test at [www.Lni.wa.gov/IndependentContractor](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/IndependentContractor).

## Keep your workplace safe

Whether you have employees, temporary agency employees or subcontractors, you must keep your job site free from recognized hazards that may cause injury or death. Know the occupational safety and health rules that apply to your workplace, including requirements for:

- A written safety plan — also called an accident prevention plan — tailored to your business.
- Safety training and protective equipment for employees.
- A safety meeting before starting each construction project and weekly meetings once the project begins.
- Sign-in sheets at safety meetings to document staff attendance.
- Keeping meeting agendas, notes and attendance records for one year.

For safety information, resources and to arrange a free workplace safety consultation, go to [www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety) and click on "Get started with safety & health."



# Keep your workers' comp insurance costs low

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## Workers' compensation insurance: Tips to improve recordkeeping and lower your rates

Ensure the risk classifications that L&I assigns your business accurately reflect your workers' actual job activities. Check your risk classes at [www.Lni.wa.gov/Verify](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Verify). If your risk classes aren't accurate, contact your L&I account manager. Here are more tips:

- Create good employee and payroll records. Time sheets should show dates, times and worker activities (if your business has more than one risk class).
- Keep time sheets and other payroll records for at least four years.
- Encourage injured employees to get medical care for injuries. It's against the law to discourage an employee from filing a workers' comp claim.
- Operate a safe workplace and bring injured workers back to work as soon as medically appropriate.

Learn how to keep your rates as low as possible at [www.Lni.wa.gov/ControlMyRates](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/ControlMyRates).

## What is prime contractor liability?

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If your subcontractors meet the independent contractor test because they bring workers to the job, but they fail to pay workers' comp premiums on those workers, you still could be held liable for those premiums.

How can you avoid getting stuck with your subcontractors' workers' comp premiums? At a minimum, go to [www.Lni.wa.gov/Verify](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Verify) and do the following:

- Verify your subcontractors' contractor registrations are current and active.
- Before hiring subcontractors, confirm they have a workers' comp account in good standing.
- If their account is in good standing, print and keep the "Certificate of Workers' Compensation Coverage" and other documentation for four years.
- Submit a "Track this contractor" request on the site. This will track their workers' comp and registration status for you for one year.
- Before making final payments, check your subcontractors' workers' comp accounts to ensure their accounts are still current.
- For more tips, go to [www.Lni.wa.gov](http://www.Lni.wa.gov) and search for "Prime Contractor Liability."



## What's a risk class?

It's a category of employers grouped together by common job operations and the hazards their employees face in the workplace. L&I sets the base rate of how much employers in a risk class will pay for workers' compensation insurance. That rate is based on the hours and claims reported in the class.



## Planning to bid on public works projects?

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### Learn the requirements for paying the prevailing wage

Contractors and subcontractors on state- or local government-funded projects must pay employees at least the “prevailing rate of wage” that’s been calculated for the applicable trade or occupation in that county. State or local government projects with federal funding are subject to both state prevailing wage law and the federal Davis-Bacon Act.

Contractors and subcontractors on public works projects must file, and obtain L&I approval of, a “Statement of Intent to Pay Prevailing Wages” (an Intent) to get paid for their work. When the work is complete, they must file an “Affidavit of Wages Paid” (an Affidavit).

Overtime on public work can include daily, weekly and special prevailing overtime requirements.

Questions? Contact a prevailing wage technical specialist at [pw1@Lni.wa.gov](mailto:pw1@Lni.wa.gov) or 360-902-5335. Learn the requirements and rates for paying prevailing wage on public works projects at [www.Lni.wa.gov/PrevailingWage](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/PrevailingWage).

Free prevailing wage workshops with basic and advanced classes are offered as part of L&I’s Contractor Training Days. For information, go to [www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors), and click on “Training and Workshops.”

## Free education and training opportunities – L&I wants your business to be a success

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Our agency partners with other state and local governments, business industry associations, not-for-profit entities and consumer groups to provide free all-day training courses across the state called **Contractor Training Days**. You will learn:

- How to create the accident prevention plan that all contractors must have.
- How to properly pay and collect sales and other state taxes.
- About workers’ comp insurance and what to do if a worker is hurt on the job.
- About registration requirements and special certifications, such as lead and asbestos abatement.
- How to bid effectively, market your business, and include the right type of information in your construction contract.
- And a whole lot more!

To get registration information and the list of upcoming classes, go to [www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors), and click on “Training and Workshops.”



## Disclosure Statement Notice to Customers

Contractor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

This contractor is registered with the state of Washington, registration no. \_\_\_\_\_  
has posted with the state a bond or deposit of \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the purpose of satisfying claims  
against the contractor for breach of contract including negligent or improper work in the conduct of the  
contractor's business. The expiration date of this contractor's registration is \_\_\_\_\_.

***THIS BOND OR DEPOSIT MIGHT NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO COVER A CLAIM THAT MIGHT ARISE FROM  
THE WORK DONE UNDER YOUR CONTRACT.***

This bond or deposit is not for your exclusive use because it covers all work performed by this contractor. The  
bond or deposit is intended to pay valid claims up to \$\_\_\_\_\_ that you and other  
customers, suppliers, subcontractors, or taxing authorities may have.

***FOR GREATER PROTECTION YOU MAY WITHHOLD A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR CONTRACT.***

You may withhold a contractually defined percentage of your construction contract as retainage for a stated  
period of time to provide protection to you and help insure that your project will be completed as required by  
your contract.

***YOUR PROPERTY MAY BE LIENED.***

If a supplier of materials used in your construction project or an employee or subcontractor of your contractor  
or subcontractors is not paid, your property may be lienied to payment and you could pay twice for the same  
work.

***FOR ADDITIONAL PROTECTION, YOU MAY REQUEST THE CONTRACTOR TO PROVIDE YOU WITH  
ORIGINAL "LIEN RELEASE" DOCUMENTS FROM EACH SUPPLIER OR SUBCONTRACTOR ON YOUR  
PROJECT.***

The contractor is required to provide you with further information about lien release documents if you request it.  
General information is also available from the state Department of Labor and Industries.

I have received a copy of this disclosure statement.

Dated this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ of the year \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Customer

*The contractor must retain a signed copy of this disclosure statement in his or her files for a minimum of three years and  
produce a signed or electronic signature copy of the disclosure statement to the department upon request.*

For more information, please refer to RCW 18.27.114.

# Still have questions?

## Check out these websites:

**Report fraud** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/Fraud](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Fraud) or call toll-free at 1-888-811-5974.

**Washington Small Business Guide** — [www.bizguide.wa.gov](http://www.bizguide.wa.gov). Learn the essentials for starting and operating a business in Washington State.

**Required workplace posters** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/RequiredPosters](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/RequiredPosters) or from any L&I office. All posters are also available in Spanish.

**Contractor registration law** — [www.Lni.wa.gov](http://www.Lni.wa.gov). Click on “Find a Law or Rule,” and search for RCW 18.27, or call L&I toll-free at 1-800-647-0982.

**Contractor information at L&I** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Contractors) or call L&I toll-free at 1-800-647-0982.

**Prevailing wage** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/PrevailingWage](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/PrevailingWage). Requirements for paying prevailing wage on public works projects.

**Workers’ basic workplace rights** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/WorkPlaceRights](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/WorkPlaceRights). Covers minimum wage, meal and rest breaks and overtime requirements.

**Work restrictions for teens under age 18** — [www.Lni.wa.gov/TeenWorkers](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/TeenWorkers). Certain jobs, especially in construction, cannot be performed by minors.

**Employment Security Department** — [www.esd.wa.gov](http://www.esd.wa.gov) or call toll-free at 1-855-829-9243.

**Department of Revenue** — [www.dor.wa.gov](http://www.dor.wa.gov) or call toll-free at 1-800-647-7706.

**Secretary of State** — [www.secstate.wa.gov](http://www.secstate.wa.gov) or call 360-725-0377.

**L&I, Employment Security, and Revenue departments’ anti-fraud campaign** — [www.SuspectFraud.com](http://www.SuspectFraud.com).

## Contacting local L&I offices

For maps and directions, visit [www.Lni.wa.gov/Offices](http://www.Lni.wa.gov/Offices).

### Region 1

#### Northwest Washington

Bellingham ..... 360-647-7300  
Everett..... 425-290-1300  
Mount Vernon ..... 360-416-3000

### Region 3

#### Pierce County/Peninsula

Bremerton ..... 360-415-4000  
Port Angeles ..... 360-417-2700  
Tacoma ..... 253-596-3800

### Region 5

#### Central Washington

East Wenatchee ..... 509-886-6500  
Kennewick..... 509-735-0100  
Moses Lake..... 509-764-6900  
Yakima..... 509-454-3700

### Region 2

#### King County

Bellevue..... 425-990-1400  
Seattle..... 206-515-2800  
Tukwila..... 206-835-1000

### Region 4

#### Southwest Washington

Aberdeen..... 360-533-8200  
Kelso..... 360-575-6900  
Tumwater..... 360-902-5799  
Vancouver ..... 360-896-2300

### Region 6

#### Eastern Washington

Pullman ..... 509-334-5296  
Spokane..... 509-324-2600